A NEW COVENANT FOR OUR ARMED FORCES AND THEIR FAMILIES

THE CONSERVATIVE ARMED FORCES MANIFESTO 2010

WE'RE ALL IN THIS TOGETHER
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There are many threads that tie together our society, many bonds that bind us into one great nation. The bonds of responsibility and care within our families; the bonds of friendship and civility within our neighbourhoods; and the bonds of duty and obligation between the people of Britain and the Armed Forces who serve our country so selflessly.

Over the last thirteen years, these ties have been sorely tested, these bonds nearly broken. And nowhere is this more stark or more shameful than in the breakdown of the Military Covenant – that special bond of gratitude between society and those who put their lives on the line to defend our country.

Too often, our Armed Forces on the frontline have been sent into battle without the right equipment. Too often, their families have had to cope with poor housing and a lack of support at times of immense stress. Too often, veterans have been repaid for their service with inadequate support at times of great need. And to make matters worse, the defence budget was cut even while our Forces have been at war.

The Government's behaviour has let down those that wear the uniform with such pride. It is simply not good enough. Our Forces sacrifice and risk so much to do their duty by us. The least we can do in return is our duty by them.

So if elected, a Conservative government will work from day one to improve the lives of everyone in our Forces. And it will work to improve the lives of all their families. We will provide better pay for those on active duty and better support for all Service families - with special assistance for Service children whose parents are killed on active duty. And there will be new help to support veterans overcome combat stress and make the sometimes tough transition to civilian life.

We will ensure that the state does as much as it can to support and stand by its Service personnel. But this is just a start: there are so many ways in which we all, as a society, can show our support for these courageous men and women. It could be about communities turning out to cheer local regiments at welcome home parades. It could be about sports clubs providing tickets to entertainment events. Or businesses thinking about ex-servicemen and women when they have jobs to fill.

Our vision of the Big Society is one in which we all come together to solve our communal problems. It is based on respect for our great national institutions, such as the Armed Forces. It says that we must all play our part and do our bit. So with this Manifesto, we are asking everyone to join us and help us to help those serving in our name. Together, we can rebuild the Military Covenant.

Executive summary

We have a duty as a nation to give our Armed Forces the best support we can in return for the sacrifices they are prepared to make in our name. It is what is known as the 'Military Covenant' – a mutual obligation between society and Service personnel that we all have a responsibility to honour.

But this mutual respect is today being badly undermined. Over the past thirteen years, Labour have increased the commitments of our Armed Forces. But they have sent them to war without sufficient equipment or helicopters and have made cuts to regiments, ships, and aircraft. There have been numerous reports of unacceptable treatment of personnel, their families, and Forces veterans.

But worst of all is Gordon Brown's own attitude. Not only has he used visits to the Armed Forces stationed in theatres of war to publicise Labour's party political agenda, but he misled a recent public inquiry by claiming defence spending had risen every year since 1997, when the official information shows it had fallen four times in that period, despite the extension of commitments.

Our Armed Forces deserve so much better. But to bring about the change they need, we need a decisive change of government. Labour have already shown they cannot uphold the Military Covenant, while the Liberal Democrats' policies, including their weak and irresponsible stance on maintaining our nation's nuclear deterrent, show they cannot provide the clear leadership our Forces need.

We believe national security is a fundamental role of Government; that those who put themselves on the line to protect us must be treated with proper respect; and, that all of us owe a debt of gratitude for the sacrifices and commitments of our servicemen and women.

The Conservative Party has the values, the leadership and the clear programme of reforms needed to ensure our Service personnel, their families and our Forces veterans get the resources, support and respect they need:

1. **Clear leadership from government**. To ensure our personnel have the resources to match their commitments, we will protect the defence budget for 2010-11 and immediately conduct a full Strategic Defence and Security Review, with regular further reviews every four to five years. We will create a National Security Council to which opposition parties will be invited, to build consensus on decision-making. We will maintain a submarine-based nuclear deterrent, based on Trident, to ensure we are protected from nuclear threats in the long term. And we will re-examine the Ministry of Defence (MoD) budget to ensure it is spent wisely.

2. **Equipping our Armed Forces**. We will reform procurement to make the system more efficient and ensure that equipment is delivered when our Armed Forces need it at a reasonable cost to the taxpayer. All decisions on defence equipment will be determined by five clear criteria: capability, affordability, adaptability, interoperability, and exportability.

3. **Supporting our servicemen and women**. We will establish a tri-Service Military Covenant that will articulate our commitment to the men and women of the Armed Forces. We support our Forces personnel in Afghanistan and remain committed to the necessary operation there, and our strategy will have a clear focus on security and the training of the Afghan National Security Forces. The operational allowance for those serving in Afghanistan will be doubled and we will maximise their rest and recuperation time. We will change the service voting registration rules so Forces personnel do not get disenfranchised due to changes made by Labour, and we will look at changing the law to stop unfair discrimination against personnel.

4. **Supporting our Service families and children**. We will work with unit welfare officers and Service charities in providing proper relationship support to our Service families, whom we know can come under huge strain. Service children will get extra support through schools to compensate for the disruptions they experience. And we will provide university and college scholarships for the children of servicemen and women killed on active duty since 1990.

5. **Supporting our veterans**. We will offer far better help for Service leavers to settle into civilian life after leaving the Armed Forces. We will establish Britain's first state-funded

post-traumatic stress disorder treatment programme and offer better back-to-work support. We will offer veterans who have undertaken an active tour of service a new route into the teaching profession and we will also pay the university tuition fees of anyone who has undertaken a tour of active service who wants to take a first degree.

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The importance of our Armed Forces and their families

In today's uncertain world, it is essential that we maintain a highly dedicated and professional body of servicemen and women with the capability to defend our national interests, whenever they are called on to do so.

The need for this is obvious. The end of the Cold War did not herald the end of ideologically-driven conflict, as many expected. In fact, Britain was involved, with the international community, in confronting dictators and authoritarian rulers such as Slobodan Milosevic and Saddam Hussein.

But the threat to our security posed by international terrorism was fully exposed by Al Qaeda's attack on the US World Trade Centre on 11 September 2001. The horrors of terrorism also came to our own country on 7 July 2005. These attacks illustrate the complex threats we now face, and how failed states, such as Afghanistan in the 1990s, can provide safe havens from where terrorists can plot attacks.

Nuclear proliferation continues to pose a threat. North Korea has already developed a nuclear capability and Iran is believed to be actively developing one. State-on-state warfare continues to be a reality too, even in Europe, as the war between Russia and Georgia in 2008 illustrated.

Additional threats are also emerging. Militia groups such as Hezbollah are obtaining increasingly sophisticated weaponry. Piracy, especially around the Horn of Africa, is illustrating the potential for failed states to precipitate havoc at sea. And there are indications that in future, we may face new and intensified threats, such as cyber attacks, electromagnetic pulse weapons, with pressures from climate change causing resource scarcity and energy insecurity.

There are also the natural disasters, such as earthquakes, hurricanes, and tsunamis which can require military assistance in a humanitarian capacity.

All this illustrates the need to maintain Armed Forces with diverse skills, ranging from combat abilities, to technical knowledge, to diplomacy.

And we must never forget the families of serving personnel, who provide the backbone of the defence community. While our servicemen and women protect all of us from danger, it is their support that helps our personnel through the extremely tough challenges they can be required to endure. These families face unusual burdens too – the constant moving around, the emotional stress and financial worries when

the spouse or parent is at war – so they need our nation's full support as well. As do Forces veterans; our duty to them should not end when they end active service. We must improve our care for them, too.

This manifesto shows how a Conservative government will act to restore the Military Covenant and give our committed and talented Armed Forces and their families the support they need to carry out their duty. We owe them no less.

Why we need a change of government

Britain's Military Covenant is not enshrined in any law; it has no formal set of governing rules. It is simply an agreement of mutual respect and duty between society, government and Service personnel, to recognise the unique sacrifices they are expected to make for their country.

Presently, only the Army among our Armed Forces is reflected in an explicit national Military Covenant – as the official Army website says:

> 'Soldiers will be called upon to make personal sacrifices - including the ultimate sacrifice - in the service of the nation. In putting the needs of the nation and the Army before their own, they forgo some of the rights enjoyed by those outside the Armed Forces. In return, British soldiers must always be able to expect fair treatment, to be valued and respected as individuals, and that they (and their families) will be sustained and rewarded by commensurate terms and conditions of service. In the same way, the unique nature of military land operations means that the Army differs from all other institutions, and must be sustained and provided for accordingly by the nation. This mutual obligation forms the Military Covenant between the nation, the Army and each individual soldier; an unbreakable common bond of identity, loyalty and responsibility which has sustained the Army and its soldiers throughout its history.'[1]

The sacrifices being made continually by all our Armed Forces, however, show that their side of this covenant is without doubt being upheld throughout. The question is whether, as a society, we are providing the best support we can in return.

The sacrifice

Throughout the last 13 years of this Labour Government, our Armed Forces have been constantly involved in a wide variety of operations around the world, involving significant sacrifices from Service personnel and families alike.

Our Armed Forces have been involved in missions in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Kosovo and in Sierra Leone. In 2001, the UK participated in operations in Afghanistan to deny Al Qaeda a safe haven, and in 2006 British Forces were deployed into Helmand Province, one of Afghanistan's most volatile areas. In 2003, some 46,000 UK Servicemen and women were deployed in the offensive against Iraq – a campaign which ended in July 2009 and where 179 British Service personnel lost their lives. The Royal Navy continues to operate in the

Persian Gulf. Our Armed Forces have also assisted a variety of other missions including in Mozambique, Macedonia and East Timor.

While a significant milestone was achieved when Operation 'Banner' in Northern Ireland ended in 2007, the attack on an army base in County Antrim in 2009 by dissident republicans in which two soldiers were killed illustrated that the threat of violence from these terrorist organisations remains. That threat was illustrated most recently by the car bomb attack outside an army base in County Down.

In addition, our Armed Forces have performed a variety of other missions. At sea, the Royal Navy have worked tirelessly in combating piracy, particularly off the Horn of Africa. Our Armed Forces have worked selflessly to assist in the wake of natural disasters – such as in Pakistan, Sri Lanka, and New Orleans. They have played a role in helping our own citizens at home, for example during the Foot and Mouth outbreak in 2001, covering for the fire fighters' during strikes, and assisting civil authorities to deal with the consequences of flooding. In 2006, the Royal Navy evacuated British citizens who were stranded in Lebanon during the conflict between Israel and Hezbollah. And more recently, they have been called upon to move people stuck on the Continent due to the cancellation of flights caused by the volcanic eruption in Iceland.

Labour's neglect of the military covenant

Despite the sacrifices they have made, our Armed Forces' dedication has not been reciprocated by the Labour Government. The 1998 Strategic Defence Review stated that 'we must match the commitments we undertake to our planned resources'.[2] It further stated that 'we must also ensure that our demands on them (the Armed Forces) and their families do not become unreasonable'.[3] Labour have broken both of these central promises:

- Labour has taken a cavalier approach to the Armed Forces by increasing their commitments, yet failing to provide sufficient resources to meet them. We now know from former defence chiefs such as General Lord Walker that Gordon Brown underfunded the 1998 Strategic Defence Review, and that it was 'underfunded by well into a billion pounds'.[4] This would later have profound consequences for the Ministry of Defence.

- Since that review, frontline resources have been cut further. Since 1997, the number of regiments and infantry battalions in the Army has been reduced by around a quarter,[5] over a fifth of the Royal Navy and Royal Fleet Auxiliary combined have been axed,[6] and the number of fixed wing aircraft has

been reduced by 230[7]. This has resulted in our Armed Forces being overstretched and under resourced, and has in turn exacerbated the personnel shortages in several units.

- The Government has neglected the welfare of our servicemen and women and failed in its duty of care, as illustrated by the increasing number of reports documenting poor treatment. Service personnel were also being deployed on operations, on some occasions without the equipment they needed, and there have been severe shortages of key equipment such as helicopters and transport aircraft, as well as certain types of protected vehicles. Coroners have openly criticised the Government in its failure to provide the correct equipment on some occasions.
- Labour have let down our Service families and veterans too. They have failed to provide adequate support to Service children struggling to adjust to a new environment and curriculum when moving from one location to another. They have also failed to track the health, especially the mental health, of our veterans after they leave the Armed Forces. As a result, many veterans who suffer from a mental illness, including post-combat stress, go untreated.
- At the same time, Labour has displayed ignorance of the Armed Forces, resulting in tense relations between the Government and the military. During 2007-8, Gordon Brown appointed a part-time Defence Secretary while the Ministry of Defence was fighting two wars. In June 2009, he appointed a new Defence Secretary who had no Cabinet experience and a number of former military commanders and academics have either expressed concern that the Military Covenant has not been upheld or openly criticised the Government.
- During his time as Prime Minister, Gordon Brown has been quite happy to use the Armed Forces for party political purposes, including visiting Iraq during the Conservative Party conference in 2007. Gordon Brown also made false claims at the recent public inquiry into the invasion of Iraq that the defence budget had risen every year since 1997.

Change with the Conservatives

We believe that providing support to our Armed Forces and veterans is a fundamental duty of government and a national priority. We must honour those individuals who go beyond the call of duty for the sake of this nation. And we must show appreciation and gratitude to those who have made sacrifices for our security.

Fundamental to our approach therefore is the belief that the obligation to support our Armed Forces should extend to society, as well as government. We all have a part to play in

showing our appreciation for what the Armed Forces do to protect us. David Cameron has shown his commitment for Forces welfare from the beginning of his leadership of the Conservative Party:

- David Cameron first called for a strategy for Armed Forces welfare in October 2006;
- in 2008, David Cameron established the Military Covenant Commission, under the chairmanship of Frederick Forsyth CBE, to investigate ways to improve conditions for Service personnel. Some of the Commission's recommendations were subsequently adopted by the government, including the ability for Service families to keep their place on NHS waiting lists when they have moved accommodation;
- in June 2009, we held an Armed Forces mental health summit with over 100 participants, including leading academics and Service charities; and
- in July 2009, David Cameron launched a 'Tickets for Troops' campaign. From that one simple idea, the charity 'Tickets for Troops' was set up, and a number of sports clubs and companies now agree to donate free tickets to serving military personnel.

Conservatives in office have already taken action too: in 2008 London Mayor, Boris Johnson, introduced a free travel scheme for injured veterans.

1. A clear strategy for our Armed Forces

The first step to restoring our Military Covenant is to ensure our personnel are adequately resourced for the tasks they are asked to perform. A major source of the personnel retention problems in recent years is due to overstretch – it endangers our Armed Forces, endangers the success of operations and saps morale. The resource mismatch created by Gordon Brown's unwillingness to properly resource Tony Blair's wars has caused chronic overstretch. We will act immediately and decisively to tackle this problems.

A new Strategic Defence and Security Review

Labour has not conducted a full and proper Strategic Defence Review since 1998. We need to take stock and reflect on what has happened over the past decade.

A future Conservative Government will aim to bring commitments and resources into line through conducting a Strategic Defence and Security Review. And because we will not pre-empt a full and comprehensive Strategic Defence and Security Review, we pledge to protect the defence budget for 2010-11.

Conservatives will also make it a legal requirement for governments to conduct a review every four to five years, as they do in the United States. This will ensure that the capabilities of our Armed Forces will be examined regularly so that they best reflect the changing circumstances they face.

EU commitments

We want to maintain good defence relationships with our European neighbours. However, we believe that NATO, whilst in need of reform, should remain the cornerstone of our defence. Matters of enormous national sensitivity, such as defence procurement, are better dealt through inter-governmental bilateral and multi-lateral negotiations, rather than through supranational institutions.

We will therefore examine resources currently spent on bureaucratic and wasteful EU defence initiatives and spend the money on our servicemen and women. As part of that we will re-evaluate our position with the European Defence Agency as part of the Strategic Defence Review.

Reforming the Ministry of Defence and prioritising the front line

It would be a failure of the government's duty to fulfil the Military Covenant if it did not provide our servicemen and women with the resources they need on the front line, and instead wasted the money on needless bureaucracy or internal initiatives.

The Ministry of Defence must be made as efficient as possible. The problem now is that, under Labour, too much waste and inefficiency goes unchecked. For example, they have spent over £2.5 billion on external consultants since 1997.

So, as part of our Strategic Defence and Security Review, a future Conservative Government will examine and reassess the current structure of the Ministry of Defence and its ability to provide value for money. We will review the structure of the Ministry of Defence to reduce running costs by 25 per cent.

2. Equipping our Forces

In recent years there have been numerous instances of reported equipment shortages for both pre-deployment training and operations, including particular problems concerning helicopters, transport aircraft, and armoured vehicles.

Labour's failure

Labour came to power with a promise to deliver 'smart procurement' that would deliver equipment 'faster, cheaper, better'.[8] Yet too many procurement projects continue to be delayed and run over budget. Altogether, the 15 top projects are £4.5 billion over the expected cost at approval and are delayed by a combined total of 339 months.[9] In addition, a report by former MoD Special Adviser Bernard Gray estimated that defence projects are £35 billion over initially approved costs and are, on average, delayed by five years.[10]

The National Audit Office has highlighted how many of the cost overruns and delays result from the Labour Government's policy to 'save now, pay later'. In order to try and reduce the spending deficit, Labour have reduced current spending commitments on certain projects over the next few years, such as the Aircraft Carrier programme. But this will increase the cost in later years and create further delays.[11] Labour's financial mismanagement explains why the defence budget is over-committed by at least £6 billion over the next 10 years.[12]

Procuring the equipment our Forces need

The Armed Forces cannot take another five years of this appalling mismanagement by government. We will reform the current defence procurement structure and process to ensure that it is as efficient as possible and ensure that equipment is delivered to our Armed Forces when they need it. We will look at how to improve cost estimation of projects and improving the commercial skills and expertise of staff in the MoD. The key principles that will guide our strategy for procuring defence equipment are:

- to ensure that the Armed Forces receive the equipment they require when they need it at a reasonable cost to the taxpayer;
- to provide the defence industry with a firm basis for planning its work, through the work of our Strategic Defence and Security Review and by setting out a new Defence Industrial Strategy;
- to support defence jobs by maximising exports; and

- our policy for the defence industry must underpin Britain's strategic relationships. We regard our defence relationship with the United States as particularly important. We will also continue to seek good inter-governmental relationships with our European neighbours on defence procurement.

Getting equipment to the front line

Ensuring that equipment is delivered to the front line quickly will be one of our top priorities. That will be the principle that will guide us in delivering Urgent Operational Requirements (UORs) to Afghanistan.

First, we recognise the superb work that our workers in the defence industry do and the vital contribution they make for our Armed Forces, our security, and our economy. We are committed to securing a strong and vibrant defence industrial base and in government we will publish consultation papers on sovereign capability and the role of small and medium sized companies.

3. Supporting our servicemen and women

There has been a sense among the defence community that more understanding is needed from politicians and the public about the roles and experiences of Service personnel. The fact that only a small and decreasing proportion of the population now serves in our Armed Forces does mean that maintaining a close relationship between the military and society will remain a challenge. But that is no excuse for Labour's neglect of the welfare of our servicemen and women to date.

A new Military Covenant

It is a Conservative priority to repair the broken Military Covenant, which currently only explicitly applies to our Army. We will create a new Tri-Service Covenant, first proposed by our National Security Policy Group in 2007 and then by the Military Covenant Commission in 2008, which will apply to the Army, Navy and Air Force.[13] The new Covenant will retain its original feature in terms of providing a general statement of obligation, but it will also include specific obligations and requirements to care for Service families and veterans. It will ensure that everybody is aware of their obligations.

When our Forces personnel come home, they must be treated with the respect and dignity they deserve. Recent reports of servicemen being barred from hotels and pubs, Service personnel being told to change out of their uniforms, and Service personnel facing threats and abuse in the streets are totally unacceptable. We will ensure that our Armed Forces are not discriminated against and we will, if necessary, consider legislation to ensure it.

Support for Afghanistan

Conservatives support the mission in Afghanistan. If the Government of Afghanistan collapsed and the Taliban returned to power, Al Qaeda would come back and would be able to plot more attacks with impunity.

We will focus on ensuring that there is security in Afghanistan and protection for the local population. Our aim will be to train the Afghan National Security Forces so that Afghanistan is able to provide its own security.

Support for personnel on operations

The most recent Chief of the General Staff Report stated that: 'more single income married soldiers are finding it difficult to make ends meet'.[14] While the current financial climate is difficult, it is still important that government does all it can to help those who

put their lives on the line. This is why we will double the operational allowance for those serving in Afghanistan.

We will also look at how Service personnel's rest and recuperation (R&R) time can be maximised. R&R time should only start when Forces personnel reach the UK or their home base, not when they board aircraft.

Care for injured Forces personnel

Our injured Service personnel should receive the best possible treatment and care. That is why we support the use of specialist facilities in the NHS, such as those at Selly Oak, and why we welcome the new dedicated military ward that will open at the Queen Elizabeth Hospital this summer. But we also believe that Forces personnel recover best when they are treated alongside those who understand what they have been through. We will ensure that injured personnel are cared for in a dedicated military ward when treated in an NHS hospital.

We believe that the rehabilitation care and support provided at Headley Court is excellent, and our aim is to make similar standards of care available to any Forces personnel who need it.

In terms of compensation for injury, we will look at Lord Boyce's recent review into the Armed Forces Compensation Scheme, to see whether the reforms are improving arrangements for veterans.

Ensuring Service personnel can exercise their voting rights

It is unacceptable that 35 per cent of Service personnel recently surveyed said that they were either not registered to vote or did not know if they were or not, and 30 per cent of overseas personnel said that they were not registered.[15] This is largely due to the fact that the Labour Government has changed the rules, making it a requirement for Service personnel to re-register at regular periods. We will change the rules so that Service personnel only have to register once to vote and that the MoD has responsibility to ensure this.

Accommodation and housing

It is unacceptable that 45 per cent of our services' single living accommodation and 60 per cent of overseas single living accommodation has been classed as being in the bottom grade on a four-point scale.[16] The House of Commons Defence Select Committee said that some housing was 'disgraceful' and that some soldiers on deployment to Afghanistan felt they 'had more comfortable accommodation than their comrades left behind in Pirbright'.[17] We will look at whether there is any scope in our Ministry of Defence efficiency review to accelerate the refurbishment of Armed Forces accommodation.

We will ensure Service families get access to the 'Green Deal' we are offering householders, which will improve their homes with energy efficiency measures. This provides up to £6,500 worth of energy improvement measures – with more for hard-to-treat homes – at no upfront cost to the householder. The cost is paid for over time out of the much-greater savings made on energy bills. This will save families money and make their homes warmer in winter. A recent National Audit Office report showed that after kitchen upgrades, energy efficiency was the biggest priority in Service residents' needs for housing refurbishment, so our scheme will offer the help that Service families are asking for.[18]

4. Supporting our Service families and children

The high level of commitment required of service personnel inevitably has an impact on family life. They are away from their families more often and for longer periods of time, on top of the more regular stresses of service life, such as moving frequently from base to base. They need to be reassured that their children receive the best possible education during periods of turbulence, and that their families have the support to cope with the worry that naturally comes during times of deployments.

Service families are the backbone of the defence community and it is right they are given all the support we can provide.

Extra school support for Service children

Ofsted estimate that there are 90,000 children of Service personnel in UK state schools. Many of these children can move school repeatedly, typically up to eleven times. This often means that Service children suffer from lower confidence, difficulty in making commitments, and from gaps and omissions in their education. For example, 62 per cent of naval families say their child has problems with the difference in syllabus content when changing school, and 64 per cent have problems with the difference in the standard of education when changing school.

A Conservative Government will include Service children within new plans for a 'pupil premium' in the funding allocation received by schools so that they receive additional per-pupil support in recognition of the disruptions and challenges they face. We will use the pupil level annual school census data to identify the military personnel who should receive support from our pupil premium. Our pupil premium is designed to give those that face disproportionate challenges – like regular movement between schools, but also particular problems they can face like parental bereavement – extra support to tackle the relatively lower achievement they can suffer.

Support for relationships

Service life can put huge strain on marriages and relationships so we will work with Armed Forces chaplains, unit welfare officers, and service and relationship charities to ensure that sufficient support is provided to those couples suffering difficulties.

Scholarships for children of fallen personnel

We pledge to provide better support for the families and children of those Service personnel who have made the ultimate sacrifice. A future Conservative Government will provide university and further education scholarships for the children of servicemen and women killed while on active duty. These scholarships will cover university tuition fees as well as living costs while at university, or further education tuition fees and costs for college students. This policy will be applied from day one of a Conservative Government – and it will also apply retrospectively to the children of all military personnel killed since 1990.

5. Supporting our veterans

For the majority of Service leavers, the Armed Forces have provided a solid basis from which they can build a career and lead fulfilled lives in the civilian world. But for some, the transition is not so easy. Many face difficulties finding work and some suffer more serious problems, including mental illness, caused by combat stress.

New opportunities after leaving the Forces

At the centre of our plans to reform employment and welfare services is the Work Programme: a single service for everyone who is unemployed, which will offer more tailored specialist help for those people who find it hardest to get access to the jobs market. As part of the Work Programme we will give Service personnel facing difficulties finding a new job specialist back-to-work support through private and voluntary sector providers, which will be rewarded on a payment by results basis for getting people into sustainable work.

We also see huge benefit, however, in encouraging ex-Service personnel into teaching, which would benefit from their experience and dedication. A future Conservative Government will introduce a new Troops for Teachers programme that will award graduate teacher training bursaries of £9,000 to ex-Service personnel who have seen an active tour of duty. We will fund a trebling of the number of ex-servicemen becoming teachers so that 200 can enter teacher training per year.

A Conservative government would also pay the university tuition fees of anyone who has undertaken a tour of active service who wants to take a first degree. This will mean that more ex-Service personnel will be offered assistance than under Labour, where personnel have to serve for six years. The cost of this, and the teacher recruitment policy, will be funded from our policy of abolishing the ContactPoint database.

Mental health support

The mental health of our veterans will be a major issue in the years to come, as a result of the operations in Iraq and Afghanistan. Even now, many ex-soldiers who served in the Iraq War suffers from a mental health problem; around one in twenty (4.8 per cent) have been specifically diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) as a result of their tours of duty.[20]

The Defence Select Committee commented that identification and treatment of vulnerable veterans 'relies as much on good intentions and good luck as on robust tracking'.[21] There is no routine assessment of the mental health of general military personnel returning from operations. Research funded by the Ministry of Defence has shown that typical self-completed questionnaires used for screening are imprecise and open to manipulation.[22] Even the recent Victoria Cross winner, Lance Corporal Johnson Beharry, said that 'ex-servicemen and women should get the treatment but they don't get it'.[23]

We will create an effective, through-life, mental health scheme for our Service and ex-Service personnel. We will establish a dedicated programme for those leaving the Armed Forces to tackle post-combat mental health issues: a new mental health screening service within the Armed Forces will work to identify problems early on, and for those who need specialist help, we will establish Britain's first dedicated PTSD treatment programme within the NHS.

Medals

Many veterans have claimed that their particular operation or involvement deserved a medal or campaign medal. These range from the Pingat Jasa Malaysia medal, Bomber Command operations, those who were involved in National Service and others.

The awarding of medals is decided by the Committee on the Grant of Honours, Decorations and Medals (known as the HD Committee). But the rules governing the awarding of medals have been applied inconsistently. The Conservatives will review the HD Committee, as well as the rules governing the awarding of medals. As part of that review all outstanding medal cases will be examined.

1. See the covenant at the Army website: http://www.army.mod.uk/join/terms/3111.aspx
2. Ministry of Defence, Strategic Defence Review, July 1998, Session 1997-8, Cm 3999, para 125
3. Ibid, para 120
4. Chilcot Inquiry Transcript, 1 February 2010
5. Defence Analytical Services and Advice, UK Defence Statistics 2009, table 4.2
6. Defence Analytical Services and Advice, UK Defence Statistics 2009, table 4.1
7. Hansard, 3 March 2010, Col. 1215WA Parliamentary answer showing the 'combined number of fixed wing aircraft of all three services that were planned to be in service at the end of March 1997 and the number of fixed wing aircraft in actual service at the end of January 2010'. The answer did not include contractor owned fleets or Unmanned Aerial Vehicles
8. Hansard, 27 October 1998, Col. 804
9. National Audit Office, The Major Projects Report 2009, 15 December 2009, HC 85-I, Session 2009-10, p.6; fig.3
10. Bernard Gray, Review of Acquisition for the Secretary of State for Defence, October 2009, p.16
11. National Audit Office, The Major Projects Report 2009, 15 December 2009, p.5, para.4
12. Ibid, para.2.3
13. 'An incoming Conservative government should update and extend the Military Covenant to specify in writing for all three Services': Pauline Neville-Jones, An Unquiet World, July 2007
14. Chief of the General Staff's Briefing Team Report, 2008, p.13
15. Defence Analytical Services and Advice, Service Voting Survey 2008
16. Hansard, 27 January 2010, Col. 889WA
17. House of Commons Defence Committee, The Work of Defence Estates, 14 September 2007, Session 2006-7, HC 535, para 40
18. National Audit Office, Service Families Accommodation, March 2009
19. The Royal Navy and Royal Marines Children's Fund, The Overlooked Casualties of Conflict, November 2009
20. Amy Iversen et. al., The prevalence of common mental disorders and PTSD in the UK military: using data from a clinical interview-based study, BMC Psychiatry 9:68, 30 October 2009, table 1
21. House of Commons Defence Committee, Medical Care in the Armed Forces, 18 February 2008, Session 2007-8, HC 327, para 110
22. House of Commons, Committee of Public Accounts Ministry of Defence: Treating injury and illness arising on military operations, Twenty–seventh Report of Session 2009–10, 22 March 2010
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